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AUTHOR Gougeon, Thomas D.
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ABSTRACT

Issues in improving administrator communication in response to changing conditions within the school environment are examined in this paper. A communication model of leadership as social control is presented, based on the variables of personal orientation and motivation. A conclusion is that administrators must be prepared to understand the perspectives of different referent groups within the school--stakeholders, people of different cultures, and both sexes. The recommendation is made for administrator preparation programs to provide a minimal knowledge base in organizational, interpersonal, and intercultural communication. Three figures are included. (31 references) (LMI)

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Principal Leadership: Communication in a Changing Educational Milieu

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Thomas D. Gougeon
University of Calgary

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INTRODUCTION

Preparation programs for school administrators must remain current. As the role of a school changes and becomes more complex so must the role of its leadership. School administrator preparation programs must reflect current social movements by addressing implications to schools and their leadership.

An increasing number of school jurisdictions are providing their own leadership development programs focussed on administrative and leadership skill acquisition, creating a pool from which principals are selected. Seventy percent of the school jurisdictions in the province of Alberta provide leadership training programs for their own aspiring school administrators. In light of this, several skill-based courses at the University of Calgary Department of Educational Policy and Administrative Studies are redundant. Consequently, greater emphasis on knowledge of schools in social, political, and organizational contexts is being provided. With greater knowledge of these contexts, principals may communicate more effectively.

The thesis of this paper addresses the challenge of communication in these contexts: To operate schools within more complex and demanding environments, principals must have a broad communication knowledge base. To be successful communicators, principals must be aware of the perspectives held by people with whom they associate and value meanings these people attribute to the structures and symbols of

schools. It is important for principals to communicate the same fundamental message, even though people may attribute different meanings to it.

BACKGROUND

The study of leadership has had a relatively long history. At first, leadership was conceptualized as a series of characteristics and leader traits describing great leaders. Then, leadership was conceptualized as a process or strategy involving roles, rational decision-making, motives, and patterned behaviours. Then, it was conceptualized as a stimuli and response phenomenon involving leadership through affective insights, cultural conditions, and attributed meanings.

As organizational theorists conceptualized the school differently over the years so leadership theorists conceptualized the principalship differently. For example, the school was conceived as a hierarchical structure seventy years ago, and the principal was described in classical hierarchical terms. When schools were conceptualized as human enterprises, principals were described in more humanistic terms. Presently, the school and the principalship are being reconceptualized again. In this paper, the school organization is described in pluralistic social perspective terms and principal actions are described in cogent communication process terms.

Changing Conditions within the School's Environment

Today, most schools are cosmopolitan, heterogeneous, male administered organizations which, in addition to members of the dominant society, serve various highly political special interest groups, a multitude of ethnic minorities, and women who are more critically aware of feminist perspectives. Those identifying with groups outside the dominant society hold different expectations of the schooling process.

Present day schools respond to many pressures. They are pressured to be entrepreneurial as the private school and voucher system debates continue. Demands are made for schools to be more relevant, and some schools respond by creating school-community partnerships. Teachers want to have significant input into school based budgeting processes. Teachers want more involvement. Parents want more involvement. And in general, the public holds diverse expectations for schools to address such major social issues as AIDS, drugs, and even the devolution of teenage social structure into street gangs.

Pressure to change schools comes from other sources as well. Feminist literature has resulted in greater self awareness of female adults and adolescents. Women, realizing their lesser roles in the creation of social institutions in an androcentric society, think it essential to have their perspectives valued in the debate to restructure schools (Shakeshaft, 1987). Most male principals struggle with the

need to value female perspectives and understand the implications in every aspect of the schooling process.

In light of the growing proportions of visible minorities in the dominant white culture, all social institutions, especially schools, are burdened with a mandate to serve members of society equally. Many school systems have labelled immigrant children, children at risk, but few have developed effective ways to respond to their needs. Asian street gangs, which give their members a sense of identity and belonging, thrive because they better serve immigrant socio-emotional needs than can social institutions, including schools.

Media has increased pressure on schools, too. Since the advent of cable television, adolescents have been influenced by trends merchandised on specialized cable music channels and sports networks which operate 24 hours a day. Consequently, students seem to identify even more intensely with peer standards, while identifying less intensely with other social standards.

The School's Response to Changing Conditions

These pressures help explain the sense of confusion experienced by school officials who feel their schools are being pulled in several directions at once. Educators, confused over school goals, and means to achieve goals, tend to rely upon strong charismatic leaders and "garbage can decision-making" processes (Sergiovanni et al, 1987). But principals must be challenged to use greater discrimination

in decision making than that. Principals become leaders when they communicate what their schools are doing, why they are doing it, and constantly feedback results of their schools' work. In addition, they communicate a future vision, suggesting what their schools might do, why, and what the consequences might be (Thayer, 1988).

Lee Thayer, a communication theorist, conceptualized leadership as a subset of communication (1988). Thayer argued, "there has apparently been little impetus to contemplate the possibility that communication might be the very life of leadership." He continued, "a theory of leadership will not stand without a theory of followership" ... nor will it stand without a theory of communication that informs us of the nature of relationship between leaders and followers. For "leaders and followers and their relationships are created and maintained in communication" (1988).

Thus, communication is the essence of leadership, and in times of diverse and conflicting pressures on schools, it is vital principals effectively communicate. A principal needs to understand the history of the school system and how it evolved to its present situation; be cognizant of the educative process in the school; and, understand the values and differences in communication traditions among the various groups of people involved with the school. A principal, then, holds an understanding of every aspect of the school and leads through story telling (Thayer, 1988).

PERSPECTIVES OF THE EDUCATIVE PRACTICE

Being a story teller in a school involves different aspects of communication (See Figure 1.0). Stories incorporate language, imagery, and intent which hold specific meaning to their audiences. Listeners embrace special elements of stories with which they identify and accordingly grant these particular elements importance. The listeners are discussed below and categorized into referent groupings.

Stakeholders

Different types of stakeholders of a school view the educative process uniquely. For example, a male-dominated central office might be expected to hold predominantly hierarchical and political perspectives, whereas a teacher group might be expected to hold predominantly humanist perspectives. Thus, principals must value differences in stakeholder perspectives and communicate uniquely to each in authentic and appropriate manners. For instance, parent stakeholders might hold a simpler, more hierarchical view of the school organization. When principals caution parents that their demands seem to reflect only a part of the school's reality saying, "things take time", or "the teacher has a different recollection of events," or "the matter is actually quite complicated" parents might suspect that the principal is avoiding a serious issue. It is important principals communicate the school's perspective in a manner

Figure 1.0
Multiple Perspectives
A Typical Canadian School

COMMUNICATION STYLE	GENERAL REFERENT GROUP	SOCIAL GROUP	DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES
OC/IPC/ICC	PRINCIPAL	School Admin	Variable
OC	Stakeholders	Central Office	Political, Hierarchical
OC		Teacher	Humanist
IPC		Student	Cultural
OC		Parent	Hierarchical
IPC	Gender	Male	Content
IPC		Female	Relational, Content
ICC	Multicultural	Asian	High-Context
ICC		Europe	Low-Context
ICC		Native Indian	High-Context
ICC		White	Low-Context
ICC		Arab	High-Context

OC = Organizational Communication
IPC = Interpersonal Communication
ICC = Intercultural Communication

appropriate to parental perspectives. Principals may acknowledge parental feelings, ie it must be frustrating when the school cannot react more directly on issues. Most importantly, principals must convey the message that the school is a complex setting where diverse needs of people are honestly considered, not a simple hierarchical organization where changes can be efficiently implemented.

Students are also stakeholders. Principals communicate with students in a context which acknowledges the importance of peer standards. Students tend to hold cultural perspectives, relating to their peers through complex arrangements of social symbols. For example, dress codes are extremely important to students: Where currently adolescents prefer "NIKE" athletic shoes in areas of the U.S.A., "VANS" are preferred in areas of Canada. Dress, hair style, and other fashions are important cultural symbols to students. (Even students who demonstrate disregard for fashion and style are projecting a specific cultural symbol to which other students relate.) Many principals find it effective to describe educative processes to students while showing regard for their perspectives.

Each stakeholder differs in its fundamental assumptions or dominant perspective. Understanding these assumptions is helpful to principals in modern school systems. When principals respond to social pressures authentically and substantially, educative values can be communicated in a manner which has significance to different stakeholders. But

principals must be knowledgeable of more than stakeholder perspectives; they must be aware of gender perspectives, too.

Gender

The form our language takes is evidence of basic structural realities in our society. For example, the term "family man" is commonly used in our society, but the parallel term, "family woman" is not. The term "career woman" is commonly used, but the term, "career man" is not. Being aware of parallel terms that are rarely used is often informative. "Family woman" and "career man" are rarely used because they are redundant in our society. Thus, two socio-structural realities may be surmised from this, women are linked to family and men are linked to careers. This example supports the argument that different realities exist for men and women.

Charol Shakeshaft argued that males and females experience different realities (1987). Gilligan concluded there were differences in masculine and feminine perspectives and that people represent these perspectives by speaking in a different voice (1982). These differences are measurable through their distinct communication styles. For example, it was found female principals communicate on different levels than male principals (Gougeon 1991a). Walzlawick et al (1967) proposed that every communication message contained two types of information: content and relationship. Content information specifies the substance of

the message and is almost universally verbal. Relationship information indicates how the content is to be interpreted and is rarely verbal. The relationship information is only rarely defined with deliberateness or with full awareness. It is usually encoded and decoded unconsciously. It was suggested males do not attribute as high importance to relationship information as do females (Gougeon 1991b).

It follows, the educative process may hold different meanings to males and females because of their different realities. To communicate with people of different gender more effectively, principals acknowledge the possibility males and females may conceptualize educative processes differently. Thus, principals ought to be gender bilingual to communicate values underlying schooling processes (Gougeon, 1991c). Male principals ought to value the importance that females attribute to relational information, and female principals ought to value the importance males place on content information when they communicate.

In addition to stakeholder and gender perspectives in our society, there is a multicultural perspective. The effect of increased numbers of immigrant families with school aged children will be discussed next.

Multicultural

The flow of visible minority immigrants to urban centres throughout Canada is at an all-time high. Communication between high schools and immigrant parents (with English as a second language) is even more problematic

as cultural norms are different and language barriers are significant (Opper, 1985; Jacques, 1989; OECD, 1987; Hall, 1977). As the wave of immigration is predicted to increase in the foreseeable future, the initiatives to improve communication between high schools and immigrant parents require high priority.

People from different cultures express personal experiences in many unique ways. For example, (a) uncertainty and anxiety are expressed in culturally-dependent ways in schools (Gudykunst, 1988)[1]; (b) the level of identity with their own ethnic group felt by immigrant students is related to the level of anxiety they experience in schools (Gallois et al, 1988); (c) the degree of isolation and group identity felt by immigrant students is related to the degree that students take initiative to associate with members of the school outside their ethnic groupings (Ting-Toomey, 1988); and, (d) communication with members of individualist cultures which foster self-face maintenance ought to be different than communication with members of collectivist cultures which foster mutual- or other-face maintenance in schools (Cronen et al, 1988). Thus, principals of multi-cultural schools ought to be aware of the fundamental cultural and linguistic character each group possesses. They must understand implications these

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1 I have taken general intercultural theories here and applied them to the context of schools.

characteristics may have on communication of school values and expectations.

Another aspect is relevant to principal communication. According to Hall (1976), "culture" is like a lens which distorts how we see the world around us. Culture affects the meaning and importance we place upon stimuli which we constantly receive. Some stimuli which are attributed lower importance may be entirely ignored, while others, thought more important, are taken in. Culture also influences how we encode messages. Hall maintained, the way we encode and decode messages depends upon whether culture is characterized by high-context messages or low-context messages.

In discussing Hall's concept, Gudykunst and Kim (1984) referred to high-context communication as one in which the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person. High-context information is rarely explicitly coded or transmitted as part of the message. Low-context communication on the other hand is predominantly vested in the message and is explicitly coded. Gudykunst and Kim cited programming language for computers as an example of low context communication and communication between twins as an example of high-context communication. "Everything must be specified in the coded message (the program) or the program will not run. Communication between twins raised together who communicate with shortened

sentences and words is an example of high-context communication" (p. 13).

Hall applied the concept of high- and low-context communication to cultures. While both types of communication are used in all cultures, there is a tendency for one to dominate. Gudykunst and Kim (1984) reported that Hall and Kohls listed 12 cultures on a continuum from low-context to high-context: Swiss-German, German, Scandinavian, United States, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arab, Chinese, and Japanese. High-context communication is a long-lived, cohesive force, which is slow to change, but is unifying. Low-context communication is the opposite. It changes rapidly and easily and does not unify the group using it. People in high-context cultures are more aware of a culture's screening process than are people in low-context cultures. High-context and low-context cultures may hold different expectations of the school. High-context cultures may expect schools to support unity of peoples, emphasize relationships, and suppress individuality. Low-context cultures may expect schools to support creative thought and individuality, and stress oral and written communication.

Kincaid (1987) characterized "inshin denshin" as Japanese communication to emphasize non-verbal sensations which are instantaneously recognized. He referred to this phenomenon as "pure intelligible intuition." Kincaid also characterized Japanese communication as being taciturn and indirect. Accordingly, Japanese people may experience

heightened sensations of social and political danger when encountering directness in communication. Japanese communication was also characterized to emphasize emotional information through the phenomenon, "kuuki." It is described as an awareness that pervades the mood of all who are present. Members of low-context groups tend to be inattentive to inshin denshin and kuuki and attribute taciturnity and indirectness in people as being charming and polite. While Kincaid's characteristics specifically describe Japanese communication, it is probable that all high-context communication are similar.

Thus, principals in multicultural schools need to be aware of these implications when communicating with student and parent groups from high- and low-context cultures. School principals need to understand the extent to which communication between low-context and high-context groups may result in mis-information: Low-context groups may experience confusion if words spoken by high-context groups seem to be contradicted by their actions; and, high-context groups may feel threatened by a sense of incompleteness of communication if the intuitive and emotional aspects are omitted by low-context groups. In addition, high-context groups with low verbal English skills may experience significant alienation in a school which places much emphasis on verbal communication. School principals may respond to this by focussing on intuitive and emotional

feelings and conveying these feelings to high-context immigrant groups.

Communication between school systems and referent groups is problematic. Principals may be more successful communicating with different referent groups when communication begins from points of common agreement rather than disagreement. But at what level is experience common among these groups?

Individuals experience the same range of emotions regardless of referent group. Intensity of emotions may differ, but experiences of emotions such as sadness, happiness, isolation, bonding, and alienation are common. Therefore recognizing the emotional state of people may be a vital starting point for communication.

SOCIAL CONTROL COMMUNICATION: A PROPOSAL

Emotional experiences were central to the theory of social control communication proposed by Mitchell and Spady (1977) and Spady and Mitchell (1977a, 1977b). Individuals under the social control of leaders experience a range of feelings including intimacy, worthiness, adequacy, stimulation, acceptance, rejection, honour, success and powerlessness (See Figure 2.0). Individuals would experience principals uniquely, and respond differently, depending on how authority or power was used as a social control mechanism. Here, <u>authority</u> is defined as intrinsic motivation, where a follower is motivated by the substance or character of a leader. <u>Power</u> is defined as extrinsic

Figure 2.0
Inventory of Social Control* Experiences & Responses
Teachers Under Authority & Power of Principals
A Summary

UNDER AUTHORITY

I Experience:		**In Response, I Do:**	
	Intimacy		Encounter
	Worthiness		Value
	Security		Regulate
	Adequacy		Execute
	Stimulated		Respond
	Counselled		Believe
	Exposed		Explore
	Directed		Cooperate
	Explained		Analyze
	Assessed		Perform
	Selected		Acknowledge
	Disciplined		Accommodate

UNDER POWER

I Experience:		**In Response, I Do:**	
	Acceptance		Relate
	Rejection		Not Belong
	Social Isolation		Self-Doubt
	Honour		Recognized
	Admiration		Challenged
	Shame		Ridiculed
	Potency		Accomplish
	Success		Dominance
	Manipulation		Impotence
	Powerlessness		Meaninglessness
	Autonomy		Control
	Coercion		Excluded

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* Adapted from Mitchell and Spady (1977)

motivation, where a follower is persuaded by the resources of the leader's office. These resources may be positive or negative; something to seek or to avoid. Supported by an adequate knowledge base of similarities and differences of perceptions among the different referent groups associated with schools, principals would acknowledge their emotional states before conveying expectations. Although individuals may experience "sadness" in a similar manner, the way they communicate this feeling may depend upon their perspective held. Principals must become aware of communication patterns of different referent groups. Although the values of the school might conflict with some referent groups and not with others, it is important that the communication of the values be interpreted consistently. It is proposed that Social Control communication is a means to this end.

In Figure 3.0, a Social Control model is proposed in which the orientation of messages within communication was a variable (Gougeon et al, 1990). Values of schools may be communicated by principals through three orientations: personal, official, and structural. A personal orientation occurs when principals verbally communicate a personal perspective rather than a role perspective of the office of the principal. Principals who use a personal orientation communicate values as being personally-held, from an ego-state. Principals who communicate from an official orientation, defer their personally held values for those of the school, and verbally represent the values of the

Figure 3.0
Leadership As Social Control
Communication Model

MOTIVATION	ORIENTATION: PERSONAL (Verbal)	OFFICIAL (Verbal)	STRUCTURAL (NonVerbal)
AUTHORITY	TYPE 1	TYPE 2	TYPE 3
POSITIVE POWER	TYPE 4	TYPE 6	TYPE 8
NEGATIVE POWER	TYPE 5	TYPE 7	TYPE 9

Adapted from Gougeon et al (1990)

organization. Principals who communicate from a structural orientation, non-verbally communicate either personal or official values using organizational processes; for example, memoranda, bulletin board displays, school ceremonies, time scheduling, and evaluation procedures.

Effective principals consistently communicate values from personal, official, and structural orientations. They "walk the talk." The result is a school with a strong sense of purpose, obvious philosophy and goals. Individuals from different referent groups holding conflicting values will doubtlessly have less trouble understanding a school's values when the principal communicates from the three orientations with consistency.

CONCLUSION

Principals are responsible for communicating with individuals who have varied and conflicting conceptions of the educative process, and principals find it important to communicate consistently to many different referent groups. Each group, dedicated to a particular perspective acts to have its perspective endorsed by the school. Thus, it is the responsibility of the principal to communicate clearly with each referent group, to engage each group authentically, and to enable it to clearly understand the perspective adopted at the school level.

Principals must communicate openly and consistently at personal and official levels and their school operations must reflect these communications. They must be aware of

their own emotions and the emotions of others, intuitively communicating to some, rationally communicating content information to others. To accomplish this, they must first understand the different perspectives of all the schools' referent groups: the stakeholders, people of different cultures, and people of both sexes.

Preparation programs for school administrators must provide a minimal knowledge base in organizational, interpersonal, and intercultural communication. In addition, school administrator programs must prepare aspiring principals to value different perspectives of referent groups and to understand how a principal communicates within the changing educational milieu.

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